

*History lectures*  
*Strathclyde*

Intro. Use of Computer only 1 - & not most important - of a dozen "New ways/<sup>in History</sup> presented by TLS discussion of April, July, Sept. 1966.

- I. The New Ways in History - i.e. "new" since 50th Anniv. Historical Assoc. in 1956. At that time, TLS sup. carried no single contribution on Asian, African or Latin American history!

Since then, a move away from:

old-style biography;  
history as past-politics; (e.g. Oxford History of England);  
economic history in terms of institutions or abstract models;  
Constitutional history; Imperial history;  
Europocentric history; Anglo-Saxon parochial history;  
middle-class moral judgments; and even such hardy perennials  
as Origins of the Renaissance or of Reformation and what Barraclough  
(in Hist. Assoc. Pres. Address, April 1966) has called  
"the latest score and the batting averages in the learned games  
about the rise of the gentry or the causes of the French Revolution".

Towards what? Suggest following as a minimum list:

1. History spread over a wider field: the serious intrusion of Asia, Africa, Latin America, seen not from London, Paris or Madrid - but from "within".
2. A turn to social history in the widest sense, i.e. not Trevelyan-type "with politics left out" (Briggs); but focus on societies (ancient & modern); classes; communities; cities; villages (like E.A. Wrigley's Cóllyton, in Devon); human behaviour; the sociology of revolution; harvests, hunger, the family - i.e. a far wider range of subjects than considered "respectably-academic" even 20 years ago.
3. The study of society as an integrated whole - i.e. not sub-divided or compartmentalised polit., economic, social, moral, psychological.
4. A turn to "popular" history of society - i.e. not of the "top people" nor of "the people" as seen from elevation of Parliament, Cabinet Committee, aristocratic correspondence, national press, or even Trade Union HQ at Transport House - but "from below". Thus a new approach to agrarian history, like W.G. Hoskins in The Midland Peasant; or of Labour history, as in the work of Hobsbawm, Royden Harrison or Sydney Pollard, or Edward Thompson's Making of the English Working Class.
5. A turn to comparative history - i.e. themes common to different countries & different periods. E.G. French and English labour movements; African villages today<sup>CP</sup> with medieval English or French; French peasants of 1640 or 1789 with later peasant-problems in India or Latin America; importance of Marc Bloch's "Feudal Society" (Germany, Belgium, France) for ancient historians of Greece or Rome; the comparative study of revolution (launched uncertainly by Crane Brinton 30 years ago); comparative study of cities; the study of myths, kinship, blood feuds, witchcraft as recurring themes in ancient, medieval and modern history.
6. The history of Science and Technology; now studied at many US universities and in special courses at Leicester/Manchester/Strathclyde/ - and note continuing massive work of Joseph Needham on China.
7. More regional & local history of a new type - geared to the wider world and away from the antiquarian - i.e. studies-in-depth that have a wider significance by combining the "microscopic" with the "macroscopic" or looking thru' the telescope at both ends. Examples: Wrigley on Cóllyton; Goubert on the Beauvaisis; McManners on Angers.
8. A new type of History of Ideas: away from textbook of political theory (History schools of London, Oxon, Camb.) to history of emergence, circulation and adaptation of ideas; i.e. a study of ideas as a social and historical phenomena and not as a purely intellectual exchange. Examples: Felix Raab on Machiavelli; Ed. Thompson again; and Richard Hofstadter's Social Darwinism in American Thought.



9. A dramatic turn by historians to the social - and even the natural - sciences - to Sociology - Social Anthropology - Demography (note the historical demography of Louis Henry and P. Goubert in France and of E.A. Wrigley etc. in England) - Mathematics - Economics - Economic Geography - Archaeology - Linguistics - Social Psychology - even (marginally) to Genetics (see C.H. Darlington's "The Genetics of Society", March 1963) - Biology (see Sir Macfarlane Burnet's Boyer Lectures on "Biology and the Appreciation of Life" in 1966) - Psychoanalysis and Psychopathology.

Yet, on the last point, Bruce Mazlish (in TLS July 1966) regrets slowness of historians to respond, esp. in England. But I note from issue of "Unscheduled Events" from Ohio State University's Department of Sociology that

Disaster Research Center has existed 4 years at Ohio;  
 A Center for the Study of Violence at Brandeis, in Boston;  
 A National Research Center for Disaster Prevention in Tokyo;  
 A Centre for the Psycho-Sociological Study of Disasters and their Prevention in Paris;  
 An Organising Committee for Disaster Medicine in Sweden;  
 And a Centre for Research in Collective Psychopathology at the University of Sussex.

10. And, with these developments and "turns", the use of new Sources to answer the new questions being asked:
- (1) Thomas Hodgkin in TLS April 1966: "Sources are any kind of evidence which throws light on a given problem"; and (for African society) he instances oral tradition, archaeological finds, evidence from comparative linguistics, ethnological data, records of food crops, musical instruments, art forms, and "documents" in widest possible sense, whether from European, Ottoman, Arab, Chinese or African archives, family papers, literature, travelogues etc.
  - (2) See the massive range of documents consulted by Lawrence Stone for The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558-1641 (1966): from Close Rolls and Feet of Fines and a host of fiscal, legal and financial records to the more conventional holdings of the P.R.O.
  - (3) Advent of "Social History" compels a turn towards a wide variety of new sources: land tax and poor rate registers, pollbooks, Assizes and QS; directories; maps; parish registers; and, above all, a new focussing on local records. In brief, a tendency for wider "field work" and more frequent moves from the researcher's chair in the P.R.O., B.M., Archives Nationales or the Mitchell Library.
11. A great crop of new Journals, in addition to increasingly popular Annales (E. C.) and P. and P.: History and Theory; The Amateur Historian; various Journals of Social History; the International Review of Social History; Comparative Studies in Society and History; Sociologie et Travail; Le Mouvement Social; and, announced for Sept. 1967, a new international Journal of Socio-Economic Planning Sciences. Also a vast increase in Indian, Asian, African and Latin American journals (for which see our Barr Smith additions since the 1950s).
12. Finally, reflecting the closer links with the social sciences, new methods of enquiry, measuring and compilation:
- (1) Sampling methods of demography and sociology: see Robson's 1 in 20 in his The Convict Settlers of Australia.
  - (2) "Models" and "structures" learned from the Economists;
  - (3) Occasional teamwork & coopn. with social scientists etc.
  - (4) And, above all, the use of the electronic COMPUTER - in short, a turn towards statistical methods - sometimes (in their more refined and systematic forms) termed "quantification", or "Econometrics", or even (wait for it!) CLIMETRICS.

In brief then: to summarise:

- (1) A turn to "social" history - whether European, Asian or African.
- (2) The study of history "from below" - and "from within".
- (3) Use of the social sciences - their methods of investigating, and measuring and tabulating results.



## II. These "New Ways" have taken a long time to develop: How and Why?

1. "Wider world" history of course, closely linked with size of revolutionary-nationalism & the decline of Empires and Imperialism; but this is not my province.
2. For the rest, new needs gradually forced on historians by such historical, or objective, factors as the evolution of the modern (all-pervading) State; greater emphasis on needs of Common Man; socialism; mass entertainment; pop. cults; trade unionism; new means of identification such as the decennial census; market research; growth of communications; technology (e.g. photography). Thus problem posed and new opportunities offered.
3. But some quicker to grasp them than others. It began with Marx, to whom History and Sociology always closely linked; there was also Comte, Darwin and Weber (highly influential in historian's turn towards sociology). More recently - in past 30-odd years:

In France: M. Bloch (Oslo lectures 1929 published later as French Rural History); also Annales (f. 1929) and the Annales "school"; L. Febvre; Braudel; Labrousse; and G. Lefebvre (Paysans du Nord, 1924).

- Lefebvre: (a) applied collective psychology in "La Grande Peur de 1789" (1932);  
 (b) wrote "To write history one must know how to count";  
 and (c) Late in life (1959) stressed need for cooperation between History and Biology to establish biological link between hunger and popular disturbance.

In England: R.H. Tawney, in "The Study of Economic History", in Economics (1933): "The future of history, and, in particular, of economic history, depends on its ability to acquire a more conscious sociological outlook."

Namier, with his "structural method" (since 1929); and Postan, with his plea for "microcosmic research" (1939). Finally, in 1961, E.H. Carr (What is History?). "The more sociological history becomes & the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both." - i.e. stressing need for mutual exchange.

4. England slower to make turn towards social sciences than France. Why?

- (1) In France, greater availability of records, as centralised State developed with Louis XIV and French Revolution; in England only in 1830s.
- (2) In France, link of History and Geography in schools: cf. Lefebvre at Lille.
- 3) In England, longer survival of History as "a personal game, a poetic effusion, unpredictable, irresponsible" (J.H. Plumb).

## III. Yet obvious mutual benefits for Historians and Social Scientists to collaborate.

1. Of course, there are basic differences between History & Sociology as disciplines, which tend to keep them apart:  
 viz. (i) History with its concern for the "unique event" in the past.  
 (ii) Sociology with its chasing after "universal laws" in the present.  
 And as long as (a) History preoccupied with Biography and Political Institutions;  
 and (b) Sociology with abstract "Models", deductive method and society in the flat (e.g. Lebon/Ratcliffe-Brown), little chance of cooperation.  
 BUT now that Sociology & Anthropology have moved into field-work, inductive methods and historical perspective;  
 and History is moving over to study of Society in depth, there is plenty of common ground.

### 2. The uses of Sociology for the Historian

- (1) Greater precision of thought and terminology - [and perhaps a lot of the discussion about the gentry and about the "social aspects" of the French Revolution (advanced by Cobban) is really a matter of semantics!]



- (2) Study of society in the round - as in Anthropology.
  - (3) New subject matter: collective behaviour; family; religious attitudes and the sociology of religion.
  - (4) Drawing on the social anthropologist's experience - first hand - where historian's inevitably gained from documents. Evans-Pritchard: "How can an Oxford don work himself into the mind of a serf of Louis the Pious?"
  - (5) Directing attention to "problems of general relevance" as a salutary correction to "antiquarian fact-grubbing" (Lewis Stone).
  - (6) Methods of measuring, sampling and computing data by computer or other means.
3. But, equally, the Sociologist can learn from the Historian:
- (1) The study of the particular as well as the general - e.g. the individual case-history as well as the mechanically computed "norm".
  - (2) Society seen in terms of change and evolution - and not as static.
  - (3) Attention to the past as well as to the present: i.e. historical perspective.

Some sociologists in U.S. have learned the lesson: thus historical sociology in the work of

- (1) Neil Smelser with his study of Social Change in the Industrial Revolution
- (2) Charles Tilly's studies:
  - (a) on La Vendée: (i) study of urbanisation & organisation of rural communities in both Vendée & "revolutionary" parts of France; (ii) Relations between major social groups & classes; (iii) study of composition & organisation of social groups, both "radical" and others; (iv) discovery of nature of tensions between Town & Countryside - all this before the narration of events of 1793-4, i.e. the tensions of 1793 traced back to the tensions within society as well as within subsequent events
  - (b) [Continuing] study of Urbanisation and Political Disturbances in 19th Century France... involving
    - (i) adding up & classifying bulk of Disturbances 1830-1960;
    - (ii) study of changes in social organisation all over France;
    - (iii) combining both to analyse variations in form, intensity, incidence, social composition, and "precipitating" factors ("triggers") in all these conflicts.
    - (iv) and to make all this data available to other researchers by means of the Computer.
- (3) Gilbert Shapiro's "Quantitative Studies of the French Revolution", sampling methods of Public Opinion polls to study of French Society of late 18th century.

#### IV. The Historian and the Computer

The "Moderns" - Keith Thomas & Dr. Kahk in TLS discussion - have argued FOR the Computer; the "Ancients" (among social historians) - R. Cobb, Louis Chevalier & G.R. Elton - AGAINST it. But argument is rather "academic"; as it depends on the historian's NEEDS.

1. Inevitably, the new Social History, by involving greater numbers (from the history of the top 3% to that of the other 97%) drives him eventually towards "quantification" and the use of the Computer - and this may apply long before he reaches a study of the lower social strata.
2. It applies equally
  - whether you are analysing English charitable endowments (like W.K. Jordan);
  - counting & classifying convicts, like L. Robson;
  - studying the effects of harvests and hunger on the rural population (W.G. Hoskins);
  - adding manors, rentals, prices and incomes of the aristocracy and rural élite of the 17th century (like Lawrence Stone);
  - counting medieval manors;
  - reconstituting the peasant families of 17th Cent. Beauvaisis (P. Goubert);
  - measuring the French 17th cent. food supply (J. Meuvret);
  - classifying French popular movements of the 19th cent. (Ch. Tilly);
  - counting and classifying Russian peasant holdings (like Soviet agrarian historians);



attempting a serious historical-demographic study-in-depth of pre-industrial England (Peter Laslett, E.A. Wrigley and their Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure); calculating the economic efficiency of slavery (Conrad & Meyer) or the contribution of railways to American economic growth (R. Fogel); assessing the number of Mexicans slaughtered by the Spanish conquistadores of the 16th cent. (like Cook, Borah and Simpson); comparing the ways of life of a Kikuyu and early medieval peasant; giving a "new look" to Labour history (like Royden Harrison); and perhaps even analysing English 17th century Parliamentarians in terms of their properties and politics (Lotte); or investigating the wider circulation of ideas; classifying books and learned journals and articles in libraries; or assessing the prevalence of the various forms of "the Augustan Mode" in English 18th cent. poetry (like Professor Ralph Cohen of the University of California).

All these are compelled to count - i.e. to engage in statistical modes of enquiry - either by their own unaided efforts, by association with others, or [when numbers or the adequacy of records warrant] by resort to the Computer.

3. Of course, the Computer has serious limitations - and will not put any historians out of work!

(1) What it can do (I speak with diffidence)

- (a) Mathematically resurrect the past by counting numbers, classifying, combining, codifying, coordinating the data "fed" to it by the historian (or computing scientist) - and all this very quickly and very accurately.
- (b) Even "predict" - by projecting or continuing numerical sequences, i.e. establishing future trends from existing data. Dr. J. Kahk of Tallinn (Estonia) thus sees the possibility of actually reconstructing sources that have been irrevocably lost! (I will leave this one to the experts.)

(2) What it can not do

- (a) It can only, within the above strict limits, actually ADD to the data fed into it.
- (b) It deals with large numbers rather than small - hence the exceptional or the unique normally escapes its attention
- (c) It can only quantify - it cannot evaluate or qualify (tho' it may provide some of the raw materials for so doing). Above all, it cannot show change or evolution, or the character of a society, or human motivation. Specifically, it cannot tell you WHY the Americans revolted from the English or give you the CAUSES of the 2nd World War.
- (d) Nor can the Computer in itself remove the Bias from History or make it more objective: this depends on the prior selection of data by the historian and not on the job done on them by the computer....

In short, there is a wide area left over to the historians....

V. To take a personal example - as a recent convert to the computer's use

- 1. After taking my 1st History degree (1948) & beginning on my Ph.D., I wanted to know WHO actually took the Bastille. So, even before meeting Lefebvre (in 1949), I began to count heads and to engage in elementary & amateurish forms of statistical calculation: my samples were quite arbitrarily & unscientifically dictated by the records and not selected with the aid of demography.
- 2. In the Crowd in the F.R. I used police & prison records (mainly) to determine WHO took part in disturbances in Paris in 1787-95.
- 3. In my book on Wilkes, same preoccupation with WHO; but social focus now broader; and now greater reliance on Pollbooks, Petitions, Commissions of the Peace, Directories & Tax rolls (Land Tax & Poor Rate Books) - partly because (a) now concerned with freeholders and M/C or gentry; and because (b) "French-type" records on wage-earners etc. were, in England, less adequate & complete.



4. Since then, comparative study of French & English popular movements; "social-political" convicts; English labourers of 1830. But in none of these were numbers sufficient (and this determined as much by the records as by the problem itself) to justify or necessitate recourse to the Computer.
5. But situation changed with Gloucestershire Prison Registers of 1815-71. Here a complete record of 25,000 prisoners over  $\frac{1}{2}$  a century in an English rural county. Record is unique, as each prisoner is tabulated under some 15-20 heads - such as Name/Age/Sex/Trade/Height/Parish/Place & Date of Crime/Nature of Crime/Place & Date of Trial/Sentence/Where served/Marital state/Religion/Literacy/Conduct in Prison/Previous convictions (occasionally); and (in later years) personal details re family, work, character & connections.  
What I want to do:
  - (1) Use Computer (with Allison Priestley's help) to answer such questions as: average age of prisoners according to sex, occupation etc.; distribution of crime in 5-year periods according to sex, age, occupation, religion; the geographical distribution and "mobility" of crime; literacy and illiteracy relating to type and frequency of crime; variations in types of punishment with changes in the penal code; numbers acquitted, imprisoned and transported and variations from one 5-year period to the next.
  - (2) (Again with Allison's help) compile particular case-histories, including the unique. (Here the Computer cannot help.)
  - (3) Include all this in a wider study of Crime and Punishment in Gloucestershire, possibly by comparison with other counties (studied by less rigorous means).

## VI. The Future

An obstacle to fuller use of the Computer by social historians is the inadequacy of records (compiled, remember, by earlier generations): I have said that the Gloucester Registers are quite unique of their kind. But now we have the detailed decennial Census, invaluable for future social historian-in-depth.

So perhaps we may envisage:

1. A developing use of the Computer;
2. Increasing team-work among researchers:
 

either among historians, or between historians and other social scientists, or a combination of the two.

The last is to be hoped for, as the historian, tho' he should equip himself with a working knowledge of related social sciences, can rarely hope to master them sufficiently to do the job alone.

We have, too, the warning by Max Gluckman & his associates at Manchester in their book, Closed Systems and Open Minds:

  - (a) most fields of enquiry (they say) are open to historians and other social scientists: e.g. society, the factory system, urban development, the advance of under-developed countries; though each discipline has its own purpose, points of emphasis and focus, and means of exploration. And
  - (b) each will inevitably borrow some of the "assumptions" of the others; but there is a point (which they term the "limits of naivete") beyond which it is wiser not to venture unescorted.
3. But, of course, even a limited degree of cooperation will be sheer anathema to some historians - even cooperation among ourselves; let alone cooperation with those vulgar fellows with their inbuilt lack of time-sense and their blind faith in statistics and mechanical devices!